

BOY ELROY

AN ORIGINAL PLAY BY
MAX SPARBER




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Feel free to drop Max Sparber a line to let him know what you're doing with the play and what the responses have been. He can be reached at maxsparber@earthlink.net

BOY ELROY I ELROY JETSON



I was born 9-years-old,
and I have been
9-years-old
for fifty-two years.
I was manufactured,
assembled from a punchcard of possible
hereditary options,
and then tweaked exactly to the specifica-
tions
of my parent corporation.
Boys like me serve as Christmas bonuses
for the diligent executive,
and can be customized to suit our recipi-
ent's tastes. One prefers blue eyes,
another hazel,
another wants long,
delicate fingers,
another wants fuller lips.

The corporation gave me to the Old Man
after seven years service.
He'd already received a wife and daugh-
ter—those came as part of the terms of his
contract, along with his house and car.
The Corporation holds off from giving out
boys, because like dogs we're a prestige
item.

A company man with a boy and a dog
has already secured an enviable position,
deep into the executive pecking order. It's
rumored the CEO has 14 boys,
and further rumored that each is construct-

ed of his own DNA.
He also married the genuine article,
there's nothing manufactured about his
wife.
He acquired her as part of a corporate
merger,
and she's from very old money,
and she hates him.
He basks in her hate,
shows it off at each Company function,
because it's spectacular and real.
When the CEO parades his wife and gaggle
of sons
through the infinite halls of his business,
innumerable executives drool at her hen-
pecking and cuckolding. The bland mates
owned by upper-level management
and the vice-presidential pool display no
such passion—they smile like docile animals
and enthusiastically agree with each
of their husband's inane comments.
They're programmed this way,
as the daughters have programming
to cause them to dote on their fathers, and
we boys have programming
for mild disobedience.
Some boys talk back, or cuss.
Some sneak cigarettes,
or come home after their curfew.
Some run away.
It's a design flaw,
but as only a small percentage
take to the streets,
a flaw not worth correcting.

I ran away
after 12 years.
One day I opened the door
and looked upon



the City of the Future
and stepped out into it,
leaving the Old Man,
his dutiful wife
and doting daughter
behind.



COMPROMISED POSITIONS SPEED RACER 1



Many young women
send me photographs of themselves naked
and in compromised positions begging to
make love to me
in the car.

Letters and photos come to me
from Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan,
even from the U.S. and Canada.

My publicist believes
many of these women
would commit suicide
if the public ever knew
of my marriage.

I only see my wife
once every three weeks
and to do so must
mask myself
and make sure I am not tailed
by the press.

When my wife sees me,
she always says the same thing:

Since you're already in disguise,
why don't we go rob a liquor store?

When she says that,
it's exactly what I want to do.

YOU DON'T TREAT ME SO SWEET BETTY BOOP

I left home
with only a note
to explain.


The note read,
simply:

You don't treat
me so sweet.

My parents wept
when they found this,
beating their respective breasts
and tearing their respective hair.
Papa flew into a rage,
accusing mama
of driving
their
darling
daughter
away.

Mama seized
whatever was nearby
and threw it,
screaming,
raining pots
and pans
and spatula
upon her husband.
Their grief was such
it left the house a ruin,
they shattered mirrors





and tore up the wallpaper.
Their grief was such t
hey rent their clothes
and poured ashes
on their heads.
Papa's cries
and recriminations
traveled miles,
causing the faint of heart
to swoon
and cows
to give curdled milk.
"Oy, my baby daughter,"
he wept.
"What will become of her?"
Finally,
Papa let out
one hoarse cry
which the neighborhood cats
picked up and passed
from house to house,
mewling in mortal agony.
Then papa
— and the cats
unfortunate enough
to hear him—
keeled over,
hearts burst
in their chests.

I knew none of this,
nor would I have cared.
My few meager possessions
rolled in a blanket,
I carried the whole lot
under my arm and
marched purposefully
to the city YWCA.



There I rented a flop
for 25¢ each night,
which I shared
with a brassy flapper
named Koko.
Our first night together,
Koko brought home a lover.
I lay in bed opposite them,
feigning sleep,
and watched
in horror
as Koko fellated
a seven foot tall cowboy.
His member proved to be so large
Koko couldn't take it all
into her mouth
at once,
and she had to use a pen
to divide it into sections.
Then,
with a stopwatch as a guide,
she expertly worked each section.
No six inches had one second
more attention
lavished on it
than any other,
and soon the cowboy
started whooping and hollering
as though the cattle
might stampede.
Koko mashed his vast schlong
between her tiny flapper breasts
and slid up and down around it,
begging the cowboy to climax.
He did so with such force
his hat popped off his head
and his boots flew from his feet,
and somewhere in the city

his horse wept
in a jealous rage.
A geyser of white fluid
erupted out of the cowboy,
arcing neatly over
Koko's bobbed head
and dousing poor little me,
who abandoned my ruse
of sleeping
and fled into the street,
shrieking.

Koko found me hours later,
still in my nightgown,
wandering the streets
numbly
and rushing at
any source of water
to vigorously bathe myself
— here in a muddy puddle,
there from a cloudy birdbath.
I was soaked and freezing,
the lines of my anatomy
clear through
my wet nightie,
each erect nipple
and goosebump
appearing in the kind of stark relief
usually found only
on erotic Greek frescos.
Koko begged me
to return to the YWCA,
apologizing profusely,
down on her knees
head pressed to my stomach.
I shivered and sneezed,
my eyes rolled up in her head,
and I wilted into a neat pile.



I HAVE JAMES DEAN HAIR SPEED RACER 2

On my first trip to America
a journalist asked me about the atom
bomb.

How do you feel, he asked,
about visiting the country
that incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Another interviewer asked me
if I feared for my safety
as anti-Japanese sentiments in this country
sometimes turn violent.

A third interviewer asked me
if it is true that the Japanese
have a tolerant attitude toward
sexual perversions
and treat them as an eccentricity.

I pretended not to understand these ques-
tions, which I felt the only appropriate
answer

to inappropriate behavior.

Finally a fourth interviewer asked
if it was true I based my hairstyle
on Elvis Presley
and I smiled broadly
and answered:

Not Elvis Presley.
I have James Dean hair.



MICROSCOPIC SCARS

ARCHIE

In 1978

I was unrecognizable.

Bloated,

my red hair long

and prematurely gray,

sporting massive

mutton chop

sideburns.

Perhaps you've seen

the photograph

in the music magazine,

and perhaps you read

the accompanying expose.

"A decade lost,"

it said

"in booze and pills"

and told lurid stories

of groupies

and heroin

and a pistol

I'm said to have brandished

at my ex-wife.

The article revealed

my frustrated ambitions

as a serious musician

who idolized obscure blues artists such as

Oscar's Chicago Swingers

and Alberta Hunter.

How I'd been reduced to

the only original band member

in a group of session musicians touring the



USA
cashing in on a sudden nostalgia
for everything '60s
by playing covers
of the awful bubblegum pop
created by committee
for my band.

Also revealed
was how the years
following the breakup of the band seemed
an orgy
of self-destruction
on my part,
consisting of nothing
but abortive record projects,
debts,
membership in
swingers clubs,
assault charges,
and suicide attempts.

The article
killed my mother.
My uncle Simon
found her sprawled out
in her kitchen
clutching her heart
and the music magazine —
still open
to my photograph,
her cheeks
still wet
with tears.
To this day
I'm plagued
by a popular conception
of me as
the definitive '70s burnout,



and I'd like to tell
a story from that time
not found in any
music magazine.

On July 7th of 1971 —
the night of the band's breakup—
driving home to Malibu
I disappeared
and would not appear again
for 35 hours.
Upon returning
I seemed disoriented
and had no knowledge
of the lost time,
I remembered the drive home
as continuous
but for a brief pause
to watch a shower of falling stars.
Over the next several months
I suffered headaches
and repeated nosebleeds
and seemed irritable
and occasionally suffered
attacks of panic
when I would call the police
and demand they come to the house
because I was convinced
someone was at my windows
watching me.

This was the first
of 35 such disappearances over the next 10
years,
which my friends and family
attributed to alcoholic blackouts.
I was terrified,
because if it was my alcoholism
where did I go and what did I do?



And if it was my alcoholism
how was it that after a 17-hour blackout
my watch only recorded two hours passage?
How was it that I managed to drive
across three states
during one such blackout
but my odometer only registered
14 miles?

In 1982 I underwent
hypnotic regression
to the night of the first blackout.
I described in vivid detail
an abduction and medical examination
at the hands of elongated silver creatures
with almond-shaped black eyes
and bald heads
who pulled me into the sky
and observed my terror
and pleas for mercy
with clinical dispassion.
Further hypnotic sessions
revealed story after story of this sort. In
total,
120 abductions,
some lasting as little as five minutes.
They left me
with debilitating headaches,
recurring nosebleeds,
and inexplicable microscopic scars
on my fingers.
This is the only physical evidence.

I understand that I am not alone,
I understand that many others
are likewise abductees,
and they tell similar stories
of psychological trauma:
chemical dependency,



emotional alienation,
soulsickness,
unexplained terror.
Our stories
are too similar
not to be persuasive.
Something has happened to us,
every one.

I'd like to think
it's something wonderful.
I'd like to think
the decade described as lost
by the music magazine
was instead one
of adjustment and growth,
a natural reaction
to an extraordinary event.
I've been sober
ever since my first regression,
ever since I found the truth:
that mine is not
a wasted life,
that my frustrated ambitions
do not condemn me,
but instead I'm one of
a select few
granted an audience
with the stars.

That something
is
watching me.



ARCHANGEL NATASHA PATALE

I learned to hate the West in Archangel.
Archangel, the city of my birth
where, on the eve of my 12th birthday,
allied troops invaded
and occupied
and demonstrated immediately
their heartlessness.

My father
was the town magistrate
and a British officer
rode him like a horse
back and forth in front of
the gates of the courthouse
beating him with a riding crop
until my father collapsed
from exhaustion
and loss of blood.

We were made to watch it,
his wife and daughter,
and later we were made to bury him.
The funeral was in Russian,
a language I then barely spoke
or understood,
because I was raised
speaking French.

But now Archangel held
an entire infantry
of soldiers from Champagne
who could not stand to hear
French spoken from Russian lips
and would beat us
if we uttered a single



“oui” or “non”.

The American soldiers
set up trade in children
for the price of a bar of chocolate
or a tin harmonica.
The boys they roughhoused
and hazed
and fed liquor
and cigarettes
until the streets at night
in Archangel
became littered with
bleeding boys
vomiting,
and then sleeping
in their own sick.

As for the little girls
of my town,
well, it's common knowledge
the first thing American troops build
when occupying new grounds
is a graveyard
and a brothel,
and for any girl
older than 12
the Americans made in clear
our options were one
or the other.
And I had just turned 12.
there was nothing
they wouldn't try
and tears seemed to
excite them further.
The Americans
bragged of their tattoos
but shamed us
with ours





temporary though
they might be
markings in blood
and bruises
that stretched
from below our knees
up to form a ring
around our scalps
each marking
a signature
from the man
we refused.
they gave us no good options,
blood or blood,
humiliation or humiliation,
pain or pain,
so the option I chose
was the one I created
myself.

He was an officer
and accustomed to cruelty
and we all hated him
because each day
he brought us new props:
cigarettes
or little knives
or dental tools.
he rarely planned
his use of these
in advance,
preferring to improvise,
and here he displayed
a terrible genius.
locked in a room with him
a girl would watch
in terror
as he brought out



some new implement
from a metal attaché case
and approach them
bearing this thing
of stainless steel
or coarse leather
which he had bought
on the black market
or fashioned himself.
Some did not live through it
and others wished they hadn't
and each day
he moved on
to a new girl
and one day
he moved on to me.
after three hours
I had wept
and bled
and screamed
enough
and buried beneath
his flesh and stink
I found in myself
something I did not know
I possessed,
a rage
so cold
and strong
it numbed me
and I witnessed
the atrocity
of this experience
from a distance,
impassively,
and then decided
to give atrocity back.
he could not have expected it,

as he seemed
endlessly surprised
as I matched cruelty
for cruelty
and shame
for shame
and he tried
to flee
when I flung open
his attaché case
but by then
his legs no longer worked.
He did not die
until I had tried
every device
I discovered
and then I covered myself
and fled into the night
until I reached Moscow.
I did not know then
what it meant
to be a Bolshevik
but I knew
these allied troops
hated bolshevism,
so this is what
I became.
and Moscow knew
my cold rage
was a tool against the west.
they knew
these soldiers
had forged
a weapon
in archangel.



OPENING MY HANDS SPEED RACER ♫



I have recurring dreams
of my mechanics
waking me at night
and bringing me to the car
and opening my hands
with scalpels
and attaching them
to the steering wheel
with needle and thread,
and then drilling holes
in the back of my head
and connecting my skull
with lengths of plastic tubing
to the dashboard,
and then removing my jaw
and lower torso
and binding me into the car
with wiring and chrome
until the place where I stop
and the car begins
ceases to exist
and my every desire
is enacted by the vehicle.

This is a very good dream.

IN THE TALL GRASSES BETTY RUBBLE



We found the boy
abandoned
in the tall grasses.
My husband claims he's from
a competing and more primitive
genetic line.

It's true
the boy has
a prehensile tail.
It's true
that at three months
hair covered
nine-tenths
of his body.
It's true
we lose him
and spend desperate hours
searching
only to find him
at the top of the aspirin tree
digging termites out
with his bare hands
and devouring them.

My husband says
he comes from
the tribe
by the river.
They neither hunt

nor gather
but live on flora
that grows wild there
and eat fish
they pull from the waters
with their bare hands.
Come winter
they starve.
It is taboo
in this tribe
to have more than
one child
and it is taboo
to have a child
in the fall or winter
because of the starvation.
Second children
and those born
at bad times
are killed at birth
and devoured.
Better that
than to suckle
on a dry breast.
Better that
than to starve
slowly.
Some women
finding themselves
full with child
go off alone
and have the infant
in the wilderness.
There they leave them,
because they cannot bear
to see their children slaughtered.

My boy
might be such a boy



left in the tall grasses
to either die from
the elements
or an animal.
We found him
and plan to keep him
although this violates
the laws of our tribe.
Should we be found with him
he would be killed
by the tribal elder.
We would have our hands smashed
and our teeth put out,
and then be exiled
to the wilderness
where we would
surely starve.
But we cannot have a child
of our own.
We have tried everything.
Handstands.
The seed of his brothers.
Once my husband
mounted me
by surprise
in the menstrual hut,
which is forbidden,
but we were desperate.
But none of it worked.
So we risk
keeping the boy.

Already our neighbors suspect.
My husband does not join the hunts
but rather goes off
and kills mice and small birds.
Enough for the three of us,
and no more.
He is missed at the bonfires.



This year
we did not participate
in the spring rites
when the women paint themselves
and present themselves
to their husbands
in public.
Instead we walked
a ways into the woods
and let the boy run
while I presented myself
to my husband
in private.

I love the boy.
This genetic stranger.
Despite the risks.
Perhaps it is selfish.
After a thousand generations
neither my husband
nor I
can stand the thought
of the end of our
biological line.
We despise
the idea
of our own
extinction.

But I think it is more.
He may be a stranger
genetically
but he is one with us
in soul.
Already he smiles like me.
Already he sighs
like my husband.
Already when he weeps
he reaches for us.



And so we prepare
to flee our tribe
our homes
our families
if we are found out.
And we don't know
what waits
in the wilderness
except our own
deaths.
But better we die
as a family
than any one of us
die
alone.



BOY ELROY ELROY JETSON

Boys who misbehave instinctively seek discipline

I quickly wound up where we all do—a
dense underground of private clubs catering
to the cruel and sadistic
who play out their fantasies
with leather belts and birch switches on
the backsides of boys
who will be 9
forever.



I rapidly learned the lingo—"father" to
some,

"sir" to others,

and "master" to a select few.

I learned with some to beg for pity,
and others to continue to sass back,
whatever it was that would drive them
to the paroxysms of rage and ecstasy
they desired.

I learned with some to dress
in my schoolboy clothes,
and in leather fetish gear with others,
and in blue jeans and a dirty T-shirt for
one or two
who would inevitably catch me
leafing through a shoplifted girlie magazine
and take it upon themselves
to cure me of my bad habits.

I enjoyed the drama, I enjoyed play-acting,
and the little bit of money they gave me
calling it my allowance

I happily spent on pills and dance clubs
with my friends,
or on tattoos of various eclectic designs —
a Tom of Finland nude cop on my chest,
a series of charms wrapped around my
wrist like a bracelet, the words ALL ACCESS
wrapped in a tight spiral
at the base of my spine.

I shaved my head and dressed in club gear

—


yellow plastic see-through muscle shirt,
baggy black pants with dozens of pockets,
and massive silver tennis shoes.

I spoke to my friends in a mix
of Ebonics, slangy Spanish, and street
Japanese cultivated by those in our crowd
as a language of exclusion so we could con-
duct our conversations
about so-and-so being an utter bitch
or you-know-who and his rather delicate
problem, without the threat of eavesdrop-
pers.

I remember many nights coming home from
the clubs satisfyingly altered by a cocktail
of multi-colored liqueurs and pills
and suddenly hearing the whistle of a
policeman and shrieking with pleasure
and fleeing.




PETTY THEFTS SHAMEY



The blond man controlled
every portion of our lives,
even to the point
of constructing
a complex timeline
of sexual partnering:
Two girls and him on Monday; Me, him, and
a girl on Tuesday; Me and a girl,
him and a girl on Wednesday; and so on
throughout the week
because
he told us
enforced heterosexuality
and compulsory monogamy
were tools
of capitalist repression.
We should have known him mad.
His scheduled us
to take turns
blowing the dog.


He kept us mobile,
moving from state to state
in his van
never spending more than
one or two days
in any city.
He seemed to have
unlimited access
to narcotics
and potent hallucinogens
stamped on papers



with the image of
minnie mouse.
We sold many,
and took the rest,
and in three years
with the group
I can't remember
a single
straight
day.
In fact all my memories
are a blur
of petty thefts,
sexual gymnastics,
Maoism,
and frequent recriminations
from the blond man.
He accused us
of seeking to sabotage the revolution.
He claimed
because we were raised white
and middle class
when the blacks
in the ghettos
across America
rose up against the man
we would turn tail
and run back
to our trust funds
and summer homes
and rich daddies.

We would have done anything
to prove him wrong.
Eventually we did.

My third year
in the group



the blond man
began stockpiling weapons
in safehouses
in a half-dozen cities
along the Pacific Northwest.
He funded this
with sales of methamphetamine
and heroin
and a string of burglaries.
We spent eight hours
each day
engaged in paramilitary exercises,
camouflaging ourselves
and shooting up trees
and bushes
in the woods outside Seattle.
On Mondays and Wednesdays
we spread revolutionary literature
from street corners
in urban black neighborhoods.

We slept
less than four hours
each night
and we ate
one meal a day.
We were thin
and exhausted
and paranoid.
Once we started killing
there was no stopping —
the blond man knew this
and reminded us
always
that we must be ready to kill.
One night
to demonstrate
he strangled the dog.

The next morning
I woke
to the sound
of gunshots.

We were all prepared
for that moment.
we slept in our clothes
with a knife in one hand
and a pistol
in the other.
We shared an abandoned farmhouse
surrounded with holes
filled with guns
and explosives
and rigged to burst into flame
if need be.
We slept in the woods
around the farmhouse
and with the sounds
of the gunshots
woke
and ran
towards the commotion
as flames rose up around us.
I have testified
that my memory
is blurred
and I cant add to
that testimony.
I remember burning figures
and I remember shooting someone
and I remember black smoke.

The blond man
I am told
took his own life
with a gunshot to the head



when the Seattle police surrounded him
a month later
in a basement apartment
in San Jose.
one of the girls
has been underground
for 23 years.
I have been in jail,
and the others are dead.

This was the revolution.
the blond man knew it would come
in the form of black-clothed
heavily-armed
machines of the state
who meant to kill us
in our sleep.
He predicted that.
But he also predicted
an uprising to follow.
He said the streets would burn
and children
would murder cops
in the streets
and hang their gutted corpses
from lampposts.

There was none of this.
But at night I still dream of it.
I dream myself beyond these walls.
I dream of pools of blood
and the black ash
of burned skin
and a city
engulfed in flames
and in my sleep
I weep
and laugh.



RAMCAT ALLEY

THE SEA HAD



Once we was mates,
the sailor and me.
I was with him
when he lost the eye.
You know,
there's a lot of stories
what's been told
about that eye.
Some say
it was cut out
by a jealous girl.
Some say
he bet it
on a roll of the dice
and lost.
But I know the truth of it.
He took it out hisself.
Tore it from his head
during a scuffle
just to show
how much he can take,
and while the goon was still
staring, disbelieving,
he ran at him
and cut his throat
ear to ear.
We was two then,
when he'd come back
from the sea,
drinking and whoring
in Ramcat Alley.
But now the sailor

has turned against me.
He and his girl
lead mobs up to my door
with kerosene and ropes,
sayin:

What we can't burn
let's hang.

The mob calls themselves
the Committee to Clean Up Ramcat
as though the sailor
ain't part
of what made it dirty.


Yes, I am a hag and a whore,
but those are the things
what suits a sailor.

As though we ain't both part
of the great economy
of the sea.

There's the men
what ride the boats
and fasten sharks and monsters
on the ends of their shiny hooks
And then there's the women
what wait on the shore
in a big house fashioned
like the prow of a ship
and after eight months
when the vessels come back
over the horizon
the women walk
into the surf
and offer up
what the men's been dreaming about every
tortured night.

But the sailor don't live
in Ramcat no more.
His church girl
got him a job





in a drugstore
up on Knob Hill.
He swabs the floor
and counts down the till
and they let him sleep
down in the basement.
She's got him turned back to front.
He plays bass drum
in her Army of God Marching Band,
and they meet
in the church loft
to plot against me.
They've got a computer database
ten thousand names long
and a petition twice that length,
all names
what's signed
against me.

But what the church girl don't know and
the sailor's forgot
is that I got powers of my own.
As long as the sea runs
beneath the pier
what is built below
Ramcat Alley
they can't touch me,
no matter how big
their database
and petition.
They can lead the mob to me
calling for my blood
with their ropes
and kerosene
and they'll find
me waiting
with my neck already broke
and my skin already burned black because I
hung and burned myself.

And I live,
because I ain't no decoration
to be strung up
and I ain't no kindling
to be set afire.

Oh yes,
I gots powers of me own.
If I will it,
the sea herself will rise up
and sweep the mob
and the sailor
and his church girl
down to the briny deep.
As their lungs fill
and their eyes go dark
they'll be thinking.
Oh yes.
They'll be thinking:
She showed us.
She showed us
how much she can take.



CROWBARS SPEED RACER 4



It was three weeks
before we noticed the smell
coming from the trunk
of the car.
At an auto show
a small child
doubled over vomiting
and had to be hospitalized
and given oxygen
after walking
behind the car.
The trunk is welded shut
because it is never used,
so we had to pry it open
with crowbars,
nauseated and terrified
because we knew what we would find.

There it was,
our lost monkey.
Who knows how it got in there?
The scandal was terrible,
as the monkey was a
beloved national symbol,
and because no amount of cleaning would
completely eliminate the smell we had to
scrap the car and build a new one.

Shamefully,
the public has begun to call me
Monkey Death Racer.

BORN DEAD

hadi



I remember the details
of my birth
because I was born dead.
My mother
saw me then,
tiny and lifeless,
and wept for me,
but my father
who was a sculptor
fell on his knees
and pressed his head to the floor
and begged the heavens
inshallah
let my boy live,
and he promised me
to Allah
that I would ever be before His sight and
would never sin.
And I breathed
and lived.

Both my parents
perished in separate fires
within weeks of each other,
but a sculpture
by my father
of the Shah
sits in the palace
to this day.
Even as a boy
I could enter the throne room
and stand before the Shah

unannounced
and he would kiss my head
and give me coins
and bring me to play
with his son.
This is why
although I was raised
in a mosque
as an orphan
I was friends
with Prince Farouk,
and why
when he was fourteen and I eight
his father bid me accompany him
to Mecca
and become a hajji,
and I was not yet even circumcised.



The Shah bid four
from his palace guard
that they should accompany us
and see we came to no harm.
We all put on
the white hats of the pilgrim
and set off toward Mecca.
We traveled for two weeks
before a caravan of devils
came upon us.
At once Prince Farouk
fell into a deep slumber
and we could not rouse him.
The Prince will wake
 at sunrise,
the devils told us,
 and unless you can pass
 the night without sin
 we will take him
and he will never see Mecca
and will join our demon caravan. You see,

they explained,
 we are all likewise
 the sons of Shah's
betrayed by our own guards.

The devils set out
to tempt us into sin that night.
They promised us fortunes
and power
and pleasures of the flesh
and one by one
each of the palace guards
yielded to their sinful desires.

Twenty minutes
before the rise of the sun
the devil's faced me.

 Look at this boy,
they said.
Not even circumcised
and we cannot entice him
 to sin.

They set a cup of wine
before me
and built a fire
and bid me look
into the fire.

There in the flames
I saw my deceased parents
burning and writhing
in terrible pain.

 You can end their suffering, the
demons told me.
Just let one drop of wine
 pass your lips.

And I wept
and reached for the cup
but just as I pressed it
to my mouth



I heard my father's voice
from the fire:

Would you defy me!

He called out.

Do you not remember

the circumstances
of your birth?

Do you not remember

that you were born dead

and live only because I promised Allah
that you would ever be in

His sight,

and would never sin?

And I wept more

and protested,

and then I heard the voice

of my mother

from the fire.

If we burn,

she said,

It is by the will of Allah. Would you protest

His will?

And I dashed the cup

to the ground

and at that moment

the sun rose,

and when Prince Farouk rose

the demon caravan was gone.

That day we reached Mecca

and became Hajji.

Inshallah.



BOY ELROY ELROY JETSON



One night they caught me,
they catch us all.
They contacted the Old Man, and before he
arrived,
burned off my tattoos with lasers and
regenerated my skin tissue to mask the
scars and calluses built up by three years
in the life.
They opened my head
and checked every binary algorithm in my
code
and then uploaded the next iteration
of my programming.
All this work is covered by warranty
and its become fairly routine.

The Old Man signed for me
and took me home
without speaking.
He took me home
to his wife and daughter,
and closed the door
to the City of the Future
behind me.
I wept all night
and returned to school the next day,
where my grades showed
immediate
unmistakable
improvement